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SUBJECT: PERES TELLS CODEL ISSA "NO GUARANTEE THE FUTURE
WILL IMPROVE"

Classified By: DCM Richard LeBaron, per 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Labor leader Shimon Peres told CODEL Issa April 16 that the United States should be promoting modernization in the Middle East -- rather than democratization -- as the best means for furthering the U.S. agenda in the region. Peres recommended using business and investment as key tools, adding that elections now in places like Saudi Arabia would only serve to usher in regimes that would oppose U.S. goals. Peres cautioned against trying to end terrorism by the eradication of terrorists alone, and stressed the need to address terrorism's underlying causes. On PM Sharon's proposed unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and some West Bank settlements, Peres opined that the plan does not go far enough, as the political costs to the government would be the same. End Summary.

12. (C) Labor leader Shimon Peres met April 16 with Congressman Darrell Issa and House International Relations Committee staff member Hillel Weinberg. Peres welcomed PM Sharon's proposed unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and some settlements in the West Bank, but added that pushing the Palestinians out of the negotiating equation would be a mistake. Although the U.S. clearly hoped to foster new leadership among the Palestinians, Peres cautioned that it was not possible to order it. It is essential that both Israel and the U.S. "deal with the Palestinians as they are and not how we might wish them to be" if progress is to be made. Sharon's proposed withdrawal plan is an opening, but not a guarantee that the future would improve.

"Israel Needs to go Further"

13. (C) Saying that FinMin Benyamin Netanyahu had lost the support of the poor that had been the traditional base of Likud support by his harsh imposition of economic reform, Peres added that now Likud had given up territory as well. Peres opined that Israel should agree to take bigger steps, as the political cost will be the same for large steps as for small ones with regard to settlements. Stressing that Sharon was his personal friend, Peres said that Sharon does not have enough courage to engage the Palestinians; instead he chooses to act alone and disengage. Peres took exception with the GOI's stance that the Palestinians must completely end terrorism before Israel is obligated to enact its obligations under the roadmap. Without some simultaneous reciprocal actions on Israel's part, Palestinian moderates are undermined before they could even begin. It is impossible, Peres concluded, to end terrorism without first addressing its root causes. The GOI is mistaken if it thinks that it can end terrorism by simply killing all the terrorists.

"Focus on Modernization, not Democratization"

14. (C) Peres said he disagreed with the United States' Greater Middle East plan, as it lumps strict Muslim countries together with more moderate ones such as Morocco and Jordan. Furthermore, "democracy is a danger," Peres said, and terror and democracy do not mix. If elections were held tomorrow in Saudi Arabia for example, conservatives would undoubtedly win. Results in Pakistan and even Morocco could be equally disadvantageous to the United States. The West needs to talk about modernization and not democratization, Peres stressed, and the U.S. should use its economic clout to get the message out. For example, if money now going to foreign aid would instead go to support U.S. companies, those companies could then go out and establish what Peres called "zones of excellence" in the Middle East. "Bring private enterprise into diplomacy," Peres recommended, "because diplomacy never succeeded in bringing in private enterprise." Giving people hope for a better life for themselves and their families would have far more impact than anything else the United States could do in the Middle East, Peres asserted. No regime, he added, could continue to support forever the high and growing levels of unemployment currently facing Arab countries.

15. (U) CODEL Issa did not have an opportunity to clear the message.

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